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Dear Members of the House Higher Education Committee:

Texas AFT is writing with regards to Interim Charge 1, which charges the committee with the following task:

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation.

Specifically, we write in reference to Senate Bill 25, which relates to measures to facilitate the transfer, academic progress, and timely graduation of students in public higher education. Monitor the process by which the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts rules via negotiated rulemaking. Monitor the progress of institutions developing recommended course sequences and the progress of the feasibility study to implement statewide meta majors.

Response is to Question 2: What role can school counselors and advisors play in the success of transferable credits? Are there ways in which the state can utilize their expertise and student relationships more effectively?

Texas AFT members believe streamlining the transfer process between public institutions is crucial to improving the overall rate of college students completing their degrees. The effort to identify and remove obstacles to students being able to move from community colleges to universities to complete their four-year degrees is necessary if we are to see more students graduating with degrees. 70 percent of all first- and second-year college students are at a community college making it the gateway to higher education for many Texans. That said, less than 35 percent of students starting at community colleges transfer to a university within 6 years. Some of the persistent challenges to students pursuing four-year degrees include misalignment between curriculums for degree programs, unclear processes, and lack of counseling support for transferring. During the last legislative session SB 25 required two-year and four-year institutions to report on when credits were transferred but not applied to a degree. The legislation also lowered the threshold for students declaring a degree plan to 30 credit hours and mandated all institutions have at least one course sequence published for each degree that is offered. These steps have helped to address some of the challenges students face when transferring credits from community college to an university. The state's interest in improving the transfer system has also paved the way for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) Committee on

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Academic and Workforce Success to work with institutions of higher education to improve their transfer systems and communications.

We encourage the THECB Committee on Academic and Workforce Success to adopt additional recommendations to strengthen the role of counselors and advisors as part of the planning and design teams looking at developing more streamlined transfer process. Counselors and advisors are able to build relationships with students and sometimes their families, which enables them to understand the individual goals and challenges for their students in addition to monitoring their academic progress. This allows them to make recommendations and provide a supportive structure and resources to students who may be struggling to complete their degree program. Without such guidance, many students would be left alone to figure out complex and often daunting requirements for transferring between institutions. This would inevitably lead to many more students not completing their degree plans. Counselors and advisors are in unique positions to provide valuable input into what is and is not working with the current way transfer credits are handled and how the process is perceived by students and their families.

The state can benefit from the experience and expertise of counselors and advisors by ensuring these professionals are part of the committees examining the transfer process in the state and that their input is sought when seeking to make changes to the current system. These individuals understand both the needs of the institutions and the students they work with and are well positioned to point out consistent barriers that make transferring more difficult, especially for vulnerable or disadvantaged student populations. They can also be utilized to solicit input from students and help communicate changes and options for transferring that may come about as a result of the work being done to improve transfers. Not tapping into them as a resource would be a giant missed opportunity by the state and those interested in seeing more students complete their degree plans.

Thank you for considering our comments as part of your future recommendations and planning.

Sincerely,

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